



## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND NATIONAL SECURITY

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"Freedom of religion is central to the ability of peoples to live together."  
-President Barack Obama, Cairo 2009

In a world where approximately 85 percent of people have a religious belief, the suppression of religious freedom and expression can lead to violence and extremism. An open marketplace of ideas is the best way to promote religious freedom and moderation.



Photos from The Department of State Democracy Photo Challenge

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**1) Countries that permit religious freedom and encourage open dialogue are less likely to propagate extremism.** When countries prevent a free religious discourse – often for purported national security concerns –shunned religious groups tend to create their own insular, and often extremist, narratives. Youth are especially susceptible to these narratives, in particular when they are unfamiliar with or unaware of the alternatives available to them.

**2) There is a strong correlation between government-sanctioned persecution and impunity and civil strife.** In countries where governments place legal restrictions on religious freedom and limit the activities of "heretical" religious perspectives, these actions promote a societal belief that violence against these marginalized groups is not only permitted by society, but legitimized by law.

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There is no panacea for religiously motivated strife and violence. However, advancing religious freedom can help ease religious and political conflict. Societies that recognize the strength in diversity and embrace the free exchange of ideas are safer and more stable. Accordingly, our national security strategy must include promoting respect for religious pluralism in society.